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ABSTRACT

The Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence (CREDE) has developed five standards for effective teaching and learning for all students, including those placed at risk for academic achievement. These standards emerge from principles of practice that have proven successful with majority and minority at-risk students in numerous classrooms. This digest focuses specifically on two of these standards: developing language and literacy across the curriculum and connecting school to students' lives. Examples of how these standards are implemented into the classroom are provided, and indicators are introduced for each standard, revealing its action components and their functions in teaching and learning. (JL)

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Digest

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Developing Language Proficiency and Connecting School to Students' Lives: Two Standards for Effective Teaching

Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence, Santa Cruz, CA

This digest is based on a report published by the Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence: *Pedagogy Matters: Standards for Effective Teaching Practice,* by Stephanie Stoll Dalton.

The Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence (CREDE) has developed the following five pedagogy standards for effective teaching and learning for all students, including students placed at risk for academic achievement: (1) teachers and students producing together, (2) developing language and literacy across the curriculum, (3) connecting school to students' lives (4) teaching complex thinking, and (5) teaching through conversation. These standards emerge from principles of practice that have proven successful with majority and minority at-risk students in numerous classrooms in several states. They incorporate the broadest base of knowledge available and reflect the emerging professional consensus about the most effective ways to educate linguistically and culturally diverse students. (See the full report to learn more about all five standards.)

This digest focuses specifically on two of these standards—developing language and literacy across the curriculum and connecting school to students' lives—and provides examples of how they are implemented in the classroom. *Indicators* are introduced for each standard, revealing its action components and their functions in teaching and learning.

Standard: Developing Language and Literacy Across the Curriculum

Language proficiency in all four modalities (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) is key to academic achievement. The following indicators provide some examples of how teachers can focus on developing student competence in the language and literacy of instruction across the curriculum.

1. Listen to student talk about familiar topics, such as home and community.
2. Respond to students' talk and questions, making on-the-spot changes that directly relate to their comments.
3. Assist language development through modeling, eliciting, probing, restating, clarifying, questioning, and praising, as appropriate in purposeful conversation.
4. Interact with students in ways that respect their speaking style, which may be different from the teacher's, such as paying attention to wait-time, eye contact, turn-taking, and spotlighting.
5. Connect student language with literacy and content area knowledge through speaking, listening, reading, and writing activities.
6. Encourage students to use content vocabulary to express their understanding.
7. Provide frequent opportunities for students to interact with each other and with the teacher during instructional activities.
8. Encourage students to use their first and second languages in instructional activities.

Language and literacy are social and cultural practices that can occur outside of school. Children from literacy-rich environments have experience with print media in their culture, and this gives them implicit knowledge about the meaning of print. Students without a literacy-rich background lack implicit knowledge of print, and need explicit instruction for literacy to develop. In this view, the teachers' role is to involve students in literate activity to accomplish learning, such as in the biodegradability project described below. This activity demonstrates how "Reading and writing are cultural practices, and direct instruction is required for those experiencing problems with them" (Purcell-Gates, 1997, p.98). The implications for direct instruction are clear, that is, teachers provide specific support when needed in the activity to assist understanding.

Kindergartners Study Biodegradability

(incorporates indicators 1, 3, 5, and 7)

I put gravel in the bottom of a 10-gallon aquarium. Then my kindergartners threw in leaves we collected on a nature walk and some food items, such as apples. I made sure the apples were near the glass so we could watch them rot. The kids also "planted" a plastic bag and an aluminum can. They put potting soil on top and watered it regularly. We put it in a south window and they were so interested that they checked it often even during free play. They kept records of the degrading process by drawing pictures each time they observed the project. They labeled the items in the drawings which showed the process of change. We discussed the drawings and students shared the most important change that their drawing documented. This information was written down by the student or the teacher and pasted on the drawing. The students compiled their drawings in the order that they made them to make a book about the biodegrading process. After the project was completed, they placed the books in the classroom library to read with peers (AERA-K Division K:Teaching and Teacher Education Listserv@asu.edu).

This project used items familiar to the students, like apples and leaves. Teachers assisted students' language learning by helping them label items in the drawings of their observations, record the information in writing, sequence the drawings and written observations, and create books about the project that others could read. Overall, the project connected student language with literacy and content area knowledge and provided many opportunities for students to interact with each other and with their teacher.

Participation in social contexts has an important influence on academic achievement. Students' informal talk and participation in general activities reveal information about their language profi-

ciency, families, and prior experiences in school and outside of school. Teachers use such informal opportunities to learn about students while encouraging student interaction in the emerging social context of the classroom. They can also promote understanding and increase student language development by using a number of strategies, including these:

- Presenting information in known contexts.
- Modeling appropriate language and vocabulary.
- Providing visuals and other materials that display language.
- Using familiar language from students' funds of knowledge.
- Using sentence patterns and routines frequently.
- Adjusting questioning to meet student needs.
- Asking students to explain their reasoning.
- Inviting students to paraphrase often.
- Simplifying sentences and syntax.
- Playing with words.

Teachers can connect instruction to compelling topics drawn from outside of school, including television, the Internet, and other interactive technologies. When teachers draw on a variety of social contexts to emphasize the explicit connections among the students' experience, language, literacy, and academic knowledge, they create an environment in which the students can also develop their language skills.

Standard: Making Meaning: Connecting School to Students' Lives

Teachers connect teaching and the curriculum by using experiences and skills from students' home and community. The following indicators provide some examples of direct and indirect approaches teachers can use to explore and draw on students' familiar and local contexts of experience.

1. Begin with what students already know from home, community, and school.
2. Design instructional activities that are meaningful to students in terms of local community norms and knowledge.
3. Learn about local norms and knowledge by talking to students, parents, and community members and by reading pertinent documents.
4. Assist students to connect and apply their learning to home and community.
5. Plan jointly with students to design community-based learning activities.
6. Provide opportunities for parents to participate in classroom instructional activities.
7. Vary activities to include students' preferences, from collective and cooperative activities to individual and competitive ones.
8. Vary styles of conversation and participation to include students' cultural preferences, such as co-narration, call-and-response, and choral.

Teachers who make meaningful connections to learning uncover and understand the sources of students' knowledge. When a sixth-grade middle school class in Zuni, New Mexico, designed a unit on the piñon nut, teachers used a traditional Zuni activity as the context for their students to think about familiar things in new ways.

Picking Piñon Nuts

(reflects indicators 1, 2, 3, 4, and 7)

The mathematics teacher came in (to the team planning meeting) and proposed a project with piñons. There is a bumper crop this year. He said, "I just figured that the piñons are here, and we can't ignore them since all the students are eating them all the time. Why not study them?" We all got excited and creative, and in a team meeting came up with the following interdisciplinary unit on "Discovery of the Community." We will take our students piñon picking at Pia Mesa Road. This activity will be integrated into our academic lesson plans in the following ways:

1) In mathematics class, students will figure out how many piñons an average sixth grader picks per hour. They will also weigh the piñons, and practice metric conversion. Students will study percentages and learn how they are used in marketing, while planning strategies for mark-ups and sales.
2) In social studies, general principles of economics will be covered to assist students in marketing strategies.
3) In science, students will learn about the piñon tree, agriculture, and the environment.
4) In language arts, students will discuss and write about this experience. They will design labels for the piñon packaging.
5) Family life will be involved, in that this activity will stress cooperation, social skills, and community and family involvement.
6) Students will actually sell the piñons and figure out their costs and profit. Any profit generated will go into the sixth-grade fund.

The piñon unit provided opportunities for teachers to work jointly to plan, teach, learn about the community and its traditions, and discuss their lessons. It involved contexts external to school where student learning is situated, such as cultural tradition, staple crop harvesting and preparation, and marketing a cash crop. Teachers began with what students knew to make a meaningful connections in an instructional project. Parents were included in field trips and other related activities. For students, learning was collaborative, hands-on, and supported by the community. The project required them to apply their knowledge in practical circumstances. From the beginning, the tasks of the unit required considerable group cooperation, interdependence, and student choice about participation, which challenged teachers to grant independence and students to accept responsibility. Teachers' joint planning for cooperative, independent, and structured activities assured success for all students at some level and increased their understanding of the concepts covered.

Conclusion

In the same way that content standards address broad curriculum goals for what instruction should address, performance standards describe concrete examples and specific definitions of student proficiency, and opportunity-to-learn standards describe capacity to ensure equal access to education, CREDE's pedagogy standards describe what teachers can do to assist students' learning. Because students enter school today with more disparate ethnicities, languages, and cultures than ever before, language development and making meaning are important standards for ensuring that teaching leads to learning for all students.

Reference

Purcell-Gates, V. (1995). *Other people's words: The cycle of low literacy.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

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